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President: Mr. Razali Ismail ..... (Malaysia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Çelem (Turkey), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 34

Assistance in mine clearance

Report of the Secretary-General (A/51/540)

Mr. Hoey (Ireland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The following associated countries — Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — align themselves with this statement. Iceland also aligns itself with this statement.

The agenda item we are addressing today, "Assistance in mine clearance", focuses our attention on the humanitarian dimension of the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines. The numbers of lives lost and bodies maimed are all the more devastating because these losses and injuries can and should be prevented. The costs in social, economic and environmental terms to countries and communities can be avoided.

Over the past year there has been a significant shift in the way these weapons are perceived by the international community, a shift that saw concrete expression in the widespread recognition at this year's session of the General Assembly of the need to conclude an international agreement to ban anti-personnel landmines as soon as possible. The European Union is committed to this goal and will work towards the achievement of an effective international agreement. We shall seek to raise without delay, in the most appropriate international forum, the issue of a total ban, to which we are committed.

Our attention is focused in this debate on the humanitarian and developmental consequences of the proliferation in the use of landmines. According to the Secretary-General's report, there are an estimated 110 million unexploded landmines in more than 70 countries. Approximately 2 million more are laid each year, while only 100,000 are cleared. Thus for every mine cleared, 20 more are laid. The scope of the problem is obvious. Peacekeeping, peace-building, rehabilitation and reconstruction in post-conflict situations are rendered extremely difficult in these circumstances.

While acknowledging the intractable nature of the problem, we must also acknowledge our responsibilities and make every effort to assist mine-clearance activities. Significant human and financial resources are being devoted by the international community to assistance in mine clearance, which is, by its nature, a long-term task; to efficient and effective demining programmes where the primary emphasis is on the development of national mine-clearance capacities by afflicted countries; to mine-awareness programmes; and to the rehabilitation and reintegration into society of victims of landmines.

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The primary responsibility for demining lies with the parties responsible for the laying of the mines. The extent to which the United Nations should be called upon to provide assistance in mine clearance must take into account the capacity of the parties involved to take on this obligation themselves. In this regard, the commitment to renounce the use of anti-personnel landmines is of particular importance.

The European Union welcomes the increased importance that the United Nations Secretariat is giving to mine clearance. We were encouraged by the consideration given to demining in the context of peacekeeping operations by the Security Council in August this year, and welcome the statement of the President of the Council, which — while recognizing the differing responsibilities of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and other United Nations bodies in this area — underlined the need to coordinate efforts system-wide.

We wish to emphasize the operational and coordination roles of the United Nations in the field of demining. In this context, the European Union supports the central role of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs as the focal point in the United Nations system for coordination, humanitarian demining and related issues. It is central to the success of the efforts of the United Nations system that there be a clear delineation of responsibilities and sufficient coordination to ensure a coherent and integrated approach to mine-clearance activities as well as the full and effective use of resources and operational capacity. Coordination with non-governmental organizations, which are playing an increasingly important role in humanitarian mine clearance, is also essential.

The European Union gives strong support to mine-clearance activities, through direct involvement in programmes with afflicted countries and through assistance to multilateral initiatives, particularly those carried out under the auspices of the United Nations. In addition to the 6.6 million ECUs it has already contributed to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance, the European Union, in September of this year, decided to earmark 7 million ECUs for demining activities up to the end 1997. Half of this amount will be contributed to the Trust Fund, and the Union is currently considering a number of proposals for support, in consultation with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. The member States of the Union also make significant national contributions to the Trust Fund, and support for mine-clearance activities feature strongly in their bilateral programmes with affected countries.

The European Union welcomes the recent international initiatives on landmines, which assisted in building consensus on, *inter alia*, how to deal more effectively with demining activities. The report of the International Conference on Mine-Clearance Technology, held in Copenhagen, contains important recommendations regarding the elaboration of international standards for humanitarian mine-clearance operations, and shows that the development and use of new and specialized equipment that will considerably enhance mine-clearance technology is not far off. We will continue to support vigorously all efforts to elaborate such international standards and to improve further demining technology.

The declaration entitled "Towards a Global Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines", adopted at the International Strategy Conference, held in Ottawa in October 1996, also includes encouraging commitments by participants on the provision of greater resources for mine-clearance and mine-awareness activities and for victim assistance. We welcome the offer by the Government of Belgium to host a follow-on conference to be held in Brussels in June next year. The conference to be hosted by the Government of Japan next year, aimed at reinforcing international support for the work of the United Nations in landmine clearance, is a welcome means through which the international agenda can be moved forward in this area. We also welcome the initiative of the Government of Germany to host a meeting on mechanical mine clearance.

The European Union will again this year introduce a draft resolution under this agenda item on assistance in mine clearance, which we hope will receive broad support and be adopted by consensus. This would provide a clear indication of the international community's commitment to deal effectively with the problem of mine clearance. Furthermore, we, for our part, are strongly committed, in the first instance, to the elimination of anti-personnel landmines through a global ban, and, secondly, to supporting, to the greatest extent possible, efforts aimed at mitigating the effects of the use of these mines, at raising awareness and at the rehabilitation of victims.

Mr. Horin (Ukraine): For the fourth time, this body is discussing the problem of the mine crisis, which has struck not only individual countries but also whole regions. One might expect that, four years after this issue

was first raised in the General Assembly, our planet would be much less contaminated by these seeds of death. Unfortunately, the available figures prove just the opposite. Each year some 2 to 3 million mines are laid, while only 100,000 are cleared. If this tendency persists, in the very near future the world may face a probably irreversible humanitarian disaster of unpredictable consequences.

That is why, if we want to avoid, or at least minimize, the possibility of such a development, two interlinked and interdependent problems must be resolved.

First, we must outlaw the use of this type of weapon. My delegation is satisfied with the fact that the Geneva Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects succeeded in elaborating an amended Protocol II that struck a delicate balance between common humanitarian aspirations and the serious concerns of many countries over the possibility of diminishing their defence capabilities owing to the imposition of new restrictions. However, the amended Protocol II appears to be quite far from meeting the expectations of the majority of States and the hopes of millions of people throughout the world. Nevertheless, an extremely important step has been undertaken to eliminate the threat which landmines pose to the civilian population.

In this context, we welcome the initiative of a number of States to elaborate and conclude a relevant legally binding international agreement. We see the comprehensive ban on anti-personnel landmines as the final goal of efforts aimed at overcoming the consequences of large-scale and indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines in many countries and regions. Ukraine will not object to the inclusion of an item on elaboration of a global anti-personnel landmine treaty in the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

Secondly, it is necessary to mobilize joint efforts to create effective organizational schemes and cost-effective technical means for mine clearance. Landmines are a major impediment to the efforts of nations weakened by conflict to rebuild their societies. Landmines prevent agricultural land from being worked, roads from being used, people from returning to their homes, confidence from being restored. It is shocking to realize that more women, children and agricultural workers are killed, wounded and maimed after ceasefires than during actual conflicts. Activities in this field are an important humanitarian undertaking which will reduce unnecessary casualties and, at the same time, enable the fragile societies that emerge from conflicts to rebuild and rehabilitate their civil societies.

The delegation of Ukraine believes that only full-scale international efforts, on both multilateral and bilateral levels, engaging all Member States as well as non-governmental organizations, can bring us closer to a real breakthrough in our endeavour. In this context, we express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on the activities of the United Nations in the field of assistance in mine clearance (A/51/540).

We recognize that the United Nations is destined to play a central coordinating role in organizing the activities of all major actors, and recent experience has proven that this role is very effective. In our opinion, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs has become a real — and not only a formal — focal point for all humanitarian mine-clearance activities. The Department coordinates humanitarian mine-clearance activities by establishing policy guidelines for post-conflict mine-clearance activities, providing managerial oversight to designated national programmes, encouraging and facilitating the development of new technology to mobilize resources for mine-clearance activities, and coordinating advocacy efforts on the mine issue.

We commend, specifically, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which are very instrumental in practical efforts to realize such programmes, which include surveying, clearance, mine awareness and training.

At a time when the United Nations is under strong criticism for its inability to reform its activities promptly, our delegation ventures to consider that the establishment of a United Nations mine-clearance potential is exemplary proof of its capacity to revitalize itself.

At the same time, no one can question the role of Member States in acting decisively in this field. That is why Ukraine attaches great importance to promoting international cooperation in mine clearance. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate that our country is prepared to provide, on specific terms, special units of its military forces for demining operations conducted under the auspices of the United Nations and other international organizations, or on a bilateral basis.

A mine-clearance training centre, established in the city of Kamyanets-Podilsky, provides all the facilities necessary to train foreign specialists in this field. We consider "train the trainer" programmes to be the most successful way to tackle large-scale demining operations. In our view, such training in Ukraine will be especially useful to prepare instructors from countries now facing the task of clearing mines produced in the former Soviet Union.

Our delegation notes with satisfaction that the problem of mine clearance has become an issue on the Security Council's agenda. The fruitful discussion that took place in the Security Council on the problem of demining in the context of United Nations peacekeeping has shed light on many acutely important issues. Among them is the necessity of closer cooperation between the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. In our opinion, it is worthwhile to follow the practice of dispatching joint missions of the two departments to areas of conflict more often. They could be asked to assess the scope of the landmine problem in each country and then develop the most effective programmes of assistance in mine clearance for the territory concerned.

It is also very important to address the problem of improving existing demining techniques. At a time when in some regions of the world the huge number of mines silently awaiting their prey exceeds the number of inhabitants, the mobilization of the scientific and material resources needed to create state-of-the-art demining technologies and instruments is evidently an extremely urgent problem. In this respect, our delegation welcomes the results of the International Conference on Mine-Clearance Technology, held in Denmark from 2 to 4 July 1996. We share the opinion that the framework adopted for the elaboration of international standards and procedures for such operations will go a long way towards making future mine-clearance activities safer, more cost-effective and more professional.

In view of the extreme importance of the issue under discussion, the delegation of Ukraine proposes that the draft resolution before the Assembly be adopted without a vote.

Mr. Iragorri (Colombia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): It is a particular honour for me to address this body on behalf of the Republic of Colombia because of the importance my country attaches to the item we are discussing today.

Once again, we are taking the time to consider the subject of assistance for landmine clearance, that is, the response of the international community to one of the most dramatic problems of our times, affecting the population of more than 70 countries. As the Secretary-General movingly said in a report to the General Assembly (A/50/701) last year, anti-personnel landmines are, indeed, weapons of mass destruction in slow motion.

It can be said that the greatest achievement of the last few years in this area has been the start of an effort to sensitize the international community to the gravity and magnitude of the problem of landmine proliferation. During this past year, numerous activities have taken place with a view to solving the problems caused by anti-personnel landmines.

In this regard, one of the highlights was the Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects, as well as the amendments to its Protocol II.

Also deserving of special attention are the International Conference on Mine-Clearance Technology, which took place last July under the auspices of the Government of Denmark, and the Ottawa Conference, at which a declaration was adopted establishing a commitment to the earliest possible conclusion of an international agreement to ban anti-personnel landmines and recognition of the fact that the international community must provide greater resources for mine-clearance operations.

My delegation commends the fact that several activities on the question have been programmed for next year, among them a conference for the follow-up to Ottawa, which will be held at Brussels in June 1997, and the conference on anti-personnel landmines to be held in March 1997 under the auspices of the Government of Japan. Those events will undoubtedly contribute to finding solutions that will be beneficial to the community of nations.

Although statistics vary, the report of the Secretary General for the current year estimates that there are 110 million landmines buried in more than 70 countries. The majority of such mines pose a threat to the life and integrity of populations of developing countries that are, or have been, the scenes of international or domestic conflicts. Those developing countries are making great

efforts to reconstruct their economies and to accommodate the return of populations displaced as a result of those conflicts.

Landmines kill and maim children gathering wood and farmers tending their fields. Landmines do not pay heed to peace treaties or ceasefires. They are perpetually waging war, against everything and everyone.

It is estimated that 25,000 mine-related casualties occur each year worldwide. Most of those victims are civilians. Each year, more landmines are laid, and mine-clearance activities cover only a fraction of them. The human and material costs are enormous. Manufacturing a landmine may cost less than $5, while its removal can cost between $100 and $1,000.

In his report, the Secretary-General draws our attention to the seriousness of the problem, noting that:

> "Assuming no new mines were laid, removing all mines currently in the ground could cost anywhere between $50 billion and $100 billion (at current prices)." (*A/51/540, para. 108*)

In addition, according to 1995 statistics, in that year approximately 100,000 landmines were deactivated, but between 2 and 5 million were laid. The current rates of funding for landmine clearance indicate that it could take more than 10 centuries to remove the mines that have already been laid. This does not take into account the fact that there are between 100 and 150 million landmines in stockpiles.

It is only fitting here to commend the role the United Nations has played in landmine clearance. Nevertheless, its programmes operate in only 9 of the 70 countries most affected. Bearing in mind that the objective of those programmes is to develop within each country a national mechanism to manage and execute an integrated programme of mine clearance and that, as a consequence of armed conflicts, the affected countries are facing considerable economic constraints, only the effective contribution of the international community can enable us gradually to overcome the serious problems caused by existing landmines.

It is evident that mine clearance alone, even at a rate that is three, five or even 10 times faster than the projects currently under way, will not solve the problem. It is impossible to solve the problems posed by landmines unless the proliferation of such weapons is halted. Therefore, any initiative is welcome, including unilateral moratoriums. However, the only real solution is a total ban on anti-personnel landmines, including their production, stockpiling, transfer and use.

In order to face the problems caused by landmines, it is necessary that action be taken in both the disarmament and humanitarian fields. An integral solution is required. In this connection, my country, convinced of the need and importance of such action, is a sponsor, along with a large number of States Members of the Organization, of the draft resolution that was adopted in the First Committee. That draft resolution supports the completion, as soon as possible, of negotiations on an international agreement to ban the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines. We are also a sponsor of the draft resolution on assistance in mine clearance that is to be considered by the General Assembly.

We remain committed to promoting actions in favour of continuing the process of assistance for mine-clearance activities. We have a historical commitment to our peoples to contribute collectively to putting an end to this indiscriminate method of sowing death.

We have witnessed with frustration and been victimized by the continuing existence of this threat. Thus, our peoples must wage a final battle to eliminate this cruel and threatening weapon from the face of the Earth. The cost to humanity created by the existence of landmines has been too high, and their elimination would be an everlasting legacy for future generations.

Mr. Biørn Lian (Norway): I should first of all like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive and informative report on assistance in mine clearance.

The Norwegian Government is deeply concerned by the increasing use of anti-personnel landmines in conflict areas. The primary victims of such mines are unarmed civilians, and particularly children. But landmines also have a devastating effect on societies at large by making entire areas of land inaccessible for decades and preventing refugees and internally displaced persons from returning home, thereby hindering social and economical development.

The only response to the scourge of anti-personnel mines is their total prohibition and total elimination. Norway has consistently advocated a total ban on the production, transfer and use of anti-personnel mines. In

June 1995, we declared a moratorium on the production, stockpiling, transfer and use of anti-personnel mines.

I am proud to announce that as of 1 October this year, all anti-personnel mines found in Norwegian military stockpiles have been removed and destroyed. In carrying out this extensive out-phasing and destruction programme, Norway has become a country free from anti-personnel mines. We hope that our example will add weight to the ongoing international efforts to ban those weapons. In addition, Norway is currently drawing up regulations prohibiting the export and import of anti-personnel mines and their components.

International action is now more important and more urgent than ever. One means of action is to increase international demining capacity, primarily by enhancing permanent local demining capabilities. With this in mind, Norway in 1996 spent in excess of $14 million on humanitarian mine-related activities — including most notably, mine clearance, training of local personnel and mine awareness — in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mozambique, Angola, Afghanistan, Cambodia, northern Iraq and Croatia. These funds have been channelled mainly through the United Nations and the Norwegian People's Aid, a non-governmental organization. I can announce here today that we will maintain or increase our support for activities of this kind in the years to come.

Furthermore, Norway is ready to contribute expert personnel to the stand-by capacity of the United Nations mine-assistance programmes through the Norwegian Emergency Preparedness System. We are also ready to help exploratory missions and to provide personnel and resources to start up United Nations mine-clearance and mine-awareness programmes.

It is a fact that more resources are set aside for the production of new weapons than for the alleviation of damages caused by the same weapons. Sadly, this also applies to mines. For this reason, we must concentrate on developing improved demining technology.

The Norwegian People's Aid, funded by the Norwegian Government, has recently used a mechanical demining vehicle — invented by the Norwegian company Tonstad and developed by Sweden's Bofors — in its demining programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The machine is expected significantly to speed up the clearing of open fields.

This is but one example of what can be done. But even more basically, since the suspected or presumed existence of mines in a given area may prevent the application of local mine-clearing technologies, more efforts need to be made towards developing mine-detection technologies. Effective mine-detection technology may be helpful in finding out, in a comparatively short time, if mines exist in a given area, and also can indicate how best to go about the exacting task of mine clearance, notably in helping local efforts and technologies.

In this respect, Norway wishes to thank the Danish Government and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs for holding the International Conference on Mine-Clearance Technology earlier this year.

The outcome of the Review Conference of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, held earlier this year, fell far short of our expectations. The amended Protocol II on landmines does not ban anti-personnel mines and does not go as far as we and many others would have wished in the area of interim protection for civilians. This is disappointing, but it should not prevent us from welcoming the amended Protocol as an important first step on the road to a legally binding global ban. We believe that the annual meetings of States parties and the next Review Conference in 2001 will serve as important forums for promoting a strong political momentum for a global ban.

It is encouraging indeed that more than 30 countries involved in the Ottawa process are now advocating a total ban on anti-personnel mines. In our view, a concerted effort by these countries will be the most effective way of continuing the fight against these weapons.

It is our hope, therefore, that the number of States that share the goals of this process will continue to grow, so that the curse that landmines inflict on innocent people throughout the world can be curbed.

Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia): The report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine clearance highlights the manner in which conflicts have transformed themselves and how the United Nations has dealt with the myriad of problems they pose. As the report makes clear, the magnitude and cost of these activities are beyond the reach of the countries afflicted by landmines. My delegation therefore welcomes the renewed consideration of this issue, which, hopefully, will lead to a better grasp of the issues at stake and enhance our knowledge on how

Member States can respond to the imperative need for demining.

The gravity of the problems attendant upon mining and related devices have long been self-evident. They affect all facets of national life in developing countries, where life cannot return to normal because of these deadly devices. The loss of life and the destitution that the civilian population has suffered during years of debilitating conflicts is perpetuated through the continued risks they face as they return to their daily lives and rebuild their communities. Consequently, this subject has emerged as a global problem of enormous proportions.

The Organization's basic approach to assistance in mine clearance has been based on the principle of national capacity-building that is sustainable once its agencies have withdrawn from the countries concerned. Time is needed to build such capacities for demining, and teams often have to take a case-by-case approach to the various countries in which they operate, since geography and mine types vary. The political will of the local authorities to cooperate with demining programmes can either seriously hinder or help in eliminating mines. Training locals to establish sustainable demining capacities is the only way to reduce the long-term effects of mines.

The issue of mine clearance is indeed complex and has technical, financial, political and administrative facets. Rightly, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs has been the focal point for demining. An integrated approach has permitted numerous agencies to coordinate their activities through the central office of the Department in order to operate effectively in the field. Other United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO), as well as a number of non-governmental organizations, are playing fundamental roles in rendering assistance in mine clearance, which Indonesia fully supports.

In the past year, the United Nations has been engaged in the implementation of demining in nine countries. The mine-clearance operations in Cambodia and Afghanistan are among the most effective. Since the setting-up process and training for mine clearance can be lengthy, it is not surprising that the best results have been registered in the longest standing programmes. The demining school set up in Angola has become the core of the demining programme. In other areas, however, mine-clearance efforts have not been effective.

Research in mine technology remains an area in which intensified efforts need to be made. The technology currently being used for mine detection and clearance is outdated. Member States that are in a position to do so can contribute properly trained and experienced instructors, the trained manpower needed to carry out demining and the training of the local populations, and appropriate and modern equipment to locate and destroy landmines. We fully support all efforts in this context.

The disastrous effects of landmines can be curbed through technical and financial assistance to demining activities and programmes. For this to materialize, international consensus and concerted political will among the Member States is imperative to deal with the problem at the source.

My delegation has noted the decision of several States to impose moratoriums on or ban the production, export and operational use of these weapons. Notwithstanding the efforts already under way to eliminate these deadly weapons, the ultimate goal remains a global ban. We therefore agree with the widely held view that such a ban is the only way to ensure the attainment of these goals and thus end the indiscriminate killing and maiming of innocent civilians.

Finally, my delegation hopes that Member States will extend their cooperation to the Secretary-General by providing relevant information on the steps taken to realize the objectives contained in the draft resolution, and we look forward to participating in all future endeavours to resolve the problems posed by landmines.

Mr. Dos Santos (Mozambique): My delegation is pleased to speak on the question of assistance in mine clearance.

The problem of landmines remains one of the most critical areas to which our Organization must pay special attention in order to minimize the loss of life. We say this conscious of the fact that the definitive answer lies, first and foremost, in the responsibility of each State to stop the production of landmines, thus preventing their use.

It is regrettable to note that more than 100 million mines are scattered throughout the world, mainly in

villages, silently waiting for their next innocent victims. More alarming is the fact that as mines are being removed one by one from the soil of some countries, new ones are being planted elsewhere, with no regard for the women and children who will invariably encounter them by accident. In my own country, the landmines that were planted during consecutive conflicts continue today to take the lives of innocent people, particularly children and women.

We are therefore pleased and encouraged to note the relevant role that the United Nations system and the international community have been playing in outlining the course of action to take in tackling the problem of landmines in many developing countries, including Mozambique. Two initiatives deserve our full support, namely the development of a sustainable national mine-clearance capacity, as envisaged in General Assembly resolution 50/82, with a view to ensuring continuity of mine clearance at the national level, and the call for a comprehensive ban on anti-personnel landmines. That is why we decided to support the draft resolution on this issue submitted at this session of the General Assembly. We also support the Security Council initiative to look at mine clearance in the context of peacekeeping operations.

On behalf of my Government, let me seize this opportunity to reiterate once again our appreciation for the remarkable work done by the United Nations Department for Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and our development partners in assisting the Government to address vital issues pertaining to the mine-clearance programme in Mozambique. This comprehensive programme includes the clearance of priority roads, the development of mine-clearance capacity and the implementation of a mine-awareness programme. The success of this programme is crucial to the efforts currently under way to rehabilitate the infrastructure in the countryside and to promote agricultural production in the rural areas.

It was in this context that my Government established in May 1995 a National Mine Clearance Commission, with responsibility for the development of all national demining policies and programmes. Furthermore, UNDP is currently assisting the National Mine Clearance Commission to develop a national mine-clearance plan that lays out mine-clearance priorities and represents a significant step forward in the development of a national demining capacity. It is expected that by the end of February 1997, national non-governmental organizations will take over the full operation of the demining process in the country.

To date, all organizations involved in mine clearance in Mozambique are collectively clearing approximately 1,000 mines and 1,000 items of unexploded ordnance per month. These records indicate that more than 20,000 mines have been cleared. Questions are often asked as to how many mines are left and how long it will take to clear them all. These are difficult to answer with any real accuracy. We are certain, however, that however many landmines there are, they must all be removed, be they 2 million, 1 million or less. The problem therefore remains great and represents a real challenge to our development efforts. One landmine or one million landmines, or even the mere threat of the existence of a landmine will cause a serious problem in a developing country such as Mozambique by slowing down the socio-economic development and preventing the local people from going about their normal lives without fear of injury or death. The continued assistance of the Assembly in the endeavours to rid the earth of this menace will be highly appreciated.

Mr. Rider (New Zealand): The scale of the problem caused by landmines is well documented, including in the Secretary-General's report (A/51/540). More than 110 million landmines have been laid in more than 60 countries. Only some 100,000 are removed annually, while at the same time millions of new ones are still being laid. The toll, in terms of death and injury, is horrendous, and all the more so since most victims are innocent civilians, many of them children.

Landmines also pose a significant threat to peacekeeping personnel. As casualties in Bosnia and Angola have sadly demonstrated, the presence of landmines is a major inhibition to the ability of the United Nations to carry out its duties in support of peacekeeping missions.

These challenges to the international community cannot go unanswered.

New Zealand calls again for an immediate and unequivocal ban on all anti-personnel landmines. The outcome of the recent Review Conference on the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons was disappointing because it did not go as far as we had hoped. Nevertheless it was a success in terms of keeping the landmines problem at the forefront of international attention. The next Review Conference will be in 2001. In the meantime, we must take every opportunity to enhance the momentum in favour of a global ban.

In April this year the New Zealand Government renounced the operational use of anti-personnel landmines by the New Zealand Defence Force. So many others have taken similar steps that it is our belief that the tide of international opinion has turned against the use of anti-personnel landmines. This was the message delivered at the Ottawa Conference in October, where a commitment was made by a large number of countries towards the earliest possible conclusion of a legally binding international agreement to ban such mines. We look forward to the follow-on conference in Brussels next year.

Those of us who attended the Ottawa meeting recognized the need to provide significantly greater resources to mine-awareness programmes, mine-clearance operations and victim assistance. We salute those who have taken a lead. In addition to Canada, I want to refer to Japan, Denmark and the United States. Germany is hosting a meeting on mine-clearance technology only next week. We welcome all these initiatives as signs that the international community is determined to address head-on the landmine threat.

New Zealand itself is proud to have been actively engaged in, and to have made a significant contribution to, international mine-clearance efforts over many years. We have contributed demining instructors and programme management personnel from the New Zealand Defence Force to United Nations operations in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Mozambique and Angola. Our personnel continue to serve in this capacity in the latter three of those places.

We have also offered financial support for United Nations efforts in demining. In July 1995, the New Zealand Government announced at the International Meeting on Mine Clearance a pledge of $NZ 100,000 per year for the next three years to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance. That annual instalment has now been increased to $NZ 250,000. In addition, New Zealand continues to provide substantial funding to the Cambodian Mine Action Centre and to the unexploded ordnance programme in Laos.

New Zealand has also provided financial support for the Mine Clearance and Policy Unit of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, and two New Zealand Defence Force officers are currently attached to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, respectively, as demining advisers.

New Zealand has welcomed the Secretary-General's moves to improve the ability of the United Nations to manage and conduct landmine-related operations: first, the establishment of the Voluntary Trust Fund, which provides a necessary and timely mechanism to channel funding to demining operations; secondly, the establishment of specialized demining units within the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs; and thirdly, the designation of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs as the focal point in the United Nations for mine-clearance activities.

These were welcome steps, but much remains to be done to ensure a more seamless approach to the conduct of the various mine-related tasks through the life of a mission and beyond. It was therefore timely that the Security Council took action in August to follow up efforts undertaken in the General Assembly to focus international attention on landmines.

New Zealand supports the Council statement of 30 August. We too recognize the need for the mandates given by the Security Council to include strategic recognition and direction on mine issues such as operational and humanitarian mine clearance, mine awareness, database information-gathering and the establishment, through training programmes, of indigenous demining capabilities.

We agree that this would better enable the Secretary-General and mission planners to allocate appropriate resources towards achieving the objectives set, and thus to ensure a smooth transition from demining as a peacekeeping requirement to demining as a long-term peace-building activity.

There is a role for the Council in more clearly defining the responsibilities for the various mine-clearance tasks among the agencies involved in a peacekeeping operation. We believe that there is a need to rationalize in order to avoid duplication. This was recognized this year by the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, which called upon the Secretary-General to intensify his efforts to provide a more coordinated approach between the demining units of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

We understand that these efforts are bearing fruit and that changes are being made to ensure that responsibilities for the coordination of mine clearance and

its execution are clearer. In this regard, New Zealand strongly endorses the decision of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs to conduct a survey to determine lessons learned from mine-clearance programmes to date. Such surveys have proved invaluable in the broader peacekeeping area. We are confident that this one will prove its worth as well in helping create uniform operating procedures and standards that will benefit both training and the conduct of operations.

Drawing also from the broader peacekeeping agenda, New Zealand would see merit in examining, within the standby force concepts currently under investigation, the possibility of a rapid mine-clearance capability that could be employed before or at the beginning of an operation. It is apparent, moreover, that operations in areas with a significant mine threat require special consideration, and thought should be given to acquiring greater numbers of mine-protected vehicles and developing operational concepts and standardized procedures to counter the mine threat. Such improvements in operational demining practices will have direct spin-offs in the humanitarian area.

These are some of the substantive issues requiring urgent action within the United Nations system if the United Nations is effectively to discharge its responsibilities in mine clearance in both the peacekeeping and post-conflict peace-building settings. New Zealand looks forward to co-sponsoring the draft resolution to be introduced shortly under this item, and which sets out those responsibilities, and our determination to meet them, in some detail.

Mr. Karsgaard (Canada): We thank the Secretary-General for his latest report on assistance in mine clearance. The report makes clear why landmines have been described as a humanitarian disaster and as the war that never ends. Anti-personnel mines, in particular, pose a great and continuing danger to millions of innocent men, women and children, often decades after the armed conflict in their country has been resolved. Landmines prevent refugees from returning to their homes, and once they have returned, prevent them from using their agricultural land to support themselves and rebuild their lives. Landmines place an enormous burden on health and social welfare systems and destroy vital infrastructure, too often in countries which can least afford such costs.

Given the urgency of the problem, we welcome the Secretary-General's description of the progress made in mine clearance in the past year. The leadership exerted by the Mine Clearance and Policy Unit of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), despite its limited resources, is welcome. We look forward to continued, strengthened leadership from DHA. We welcome as well the draft resolution that will be submitted, including in particular its important message that all Member States have a role to play in addressing the horror of landmines. Canada agrees completely with the emphasis both in the draft resolution and in the Secretary-General's report on building national capacity for mine clearance within the countries affected. Since 1993 Canada has contributed Can$ 8.5 million in grants for demining, most of which was provided to the United Nations in support of its programmes in Cambodia, Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Laos.

Those funds were often used to complement the technical assistance provided by Canadian demining experts. Canadian forces personnel played a key role in establishing the Cambodian Mine Action Centre. We are proud that the United Nations chose a retired Canadian officer to head its Mine Action Centre in Bosnia. Active and retired members of the Canadian forces have also provided training in mine awareness and mine clearance in Afghanistan, Angola and Mozambique.

In addition, Canada has given financial and technical assistance to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other United Nations organizations for their mine action programmes and has provided financial support for the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance.

While United Nations assistance remains extremely important, the primary responsibility for mine clearance within their borders still rests with Member States. The importance of a strong commitment by the host Government to mine-clearance activities in its territory cannot be overestimated. At the same time, Member States and, indeed, subnational groups have a clear responsibility for removing mines they have had a role in laying.

We welcome the Secretary-General's reference to mine clearance as a development issue as well as a humanitarian priority. We have been pressing the Bretton Woods institutions and regional development banks to consider investing in mine clearance as part of their development strategy for affected countries.

We welcome the World Bank's decision to undertake mine-clearance projects in Bosnia and are

supporting that effort financially. We hope the World Bank's example will be emulated by the regional development banks.

We wish to encourage the participation of the international development institutions, but at the same time we recognize that the involvement of more players in mine action programmes increases the need for a coordinated approach. We have in the past called on the Secretary-General to ensure close cooperation among United Nations agencies with mine action programmes. Such cooperation should also extend beyond United Nations agencies to include other members of the United Nations family and, perhaps less formally, other international governmental organizations. We are encouraging the World Bank to work closely with DHA's Mine Action Centre in Bosnia, in recognition of the important overall coordinating role DHA can and should play.

The Secretary-General's report states that approximately 100,000 anti-personnel landmines are cleared each year. That is a mere fraction of the number of mines that are laid. In other words, we are losing ground at a dramatic rate. Canada is committed to the ultimate elimination of anti-personnel landmines as the only means of controlling this scourge. In October we were greatly encouraged that 50 States adopted the Declaration of the Ottawa Conference, in which they committed themselves to ensuring, among other things, the earliest possible conclusion of a legally binding international agreement to ban anti-personnel mines.

We further welcomed the adoption by the First Committee of draft resolution A/C.1/51/L.46, calling for a global ban on landmines, with positive votes from 141 Member States and no dissenting vote. We look forward to its adoption in plenary meeting. That First Committee draft resolution, together with the Ottawa Declaration, suggest a developing momentum on which we can all build.

In addition to its concluding Declaration, the Ottawa Conference adopted an Agenda for Action to address other aspects of the landmine problem. Different portions of that Agenda are now being implemented by various Governments and organizations.

Notable upcoming activities are the conferences to be hosted by Germany, Japan and Belgium, in which Canada will be a full participant. The first two conferences will study the latest developments in demining technologies, and the Tokyo conference will also look at greater assistance to United Nations mine-clearance activities and to victims of landmines. The Belgian conference will take forward the process initiated in Ottawa.

The Canadian Government considers advances in demining technology, as well as support for landmine survivors, to be integral aspects of the landmines issue. We welcome the Japanese Government's decision to focus part of its conference on the needs of landmine victims, or as we prefer to say, survivors. Many of those survivors have the potential once again to be productive members of their societies. But they need our help, and there is much which can be done to make a huge difference in their lives. Such action need not necessarily require vast resources. While the International Committee of the Red Cross and some non-governmental organizations have been active in this area, this aspect of the landmine problem is only beginning to receive the attention it deserves from Member States. We are pleased to note that the Secretary-General's report makes reference to the situation of landmine survivors in each of its country programme reviews. We encourage DHA to act as a catalyst within the United Nations system, ensuring that vigorous action is taken to address the needs of landmine survivors.

As a follow-up to the Ottawa Conference, and to complement those being held in Germany, Japan and Belgium, the Canadian Government will be hosting a domestic forum next month. Our objective is to bring Canadians together to see how we can enhance Canada's capabilities in mine-detection and mine-clearance technology and in assisting landmine survivors.

Canada will continue to urge the international community to develop more effective and affordable humanitarian mine-clearance technologies and to recognize the needs of the landmine survivors.

My delegation is pleased to add Canada's name to the list of sponsors of the draft resolution on assistance in mine clearance that will be submitted to the General Assembly.

Mr. Owada (Japan): Over the past few years, world opinion on the issue of landmines has undergone a drastic change. Since it was first taken up and discussed seriously by this body in 1993, international efforts to eliminate landmines have gained increasing momentum as a result of a series of successful international gatherings, such as the International Meeting on Mine Clearance at Geneva in the summer of 1995, the International Conference on Mine-Clearance Technology at

Copenhagen in July 1996, which was sponsored by the Government of Denmark and, most recently, the Ottawa Conference, which was held at the initiative of the Government of Canada as part of the international effort to achieve a total ban on anti-personnel landmines. During the same period, strenuous efforts have also been made to clear mines in many parts of the world as the United Nations and other humanitarian and non-governmental organizations have engaged in mine-clearance activities in such places as Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia and Mozambique.

It is gratifying to see that in this way the international community has taken an important first step towards the goal of eventually eliminating all anti-personnel landmines. I should like to take this opportunity to express the deep appreciation of my delegation to the Secretary-General and other members of the Secretariat of the United Nations, in particular the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, as well as to the countries that have hosted the international meetings I have mentioned, for the initiative they have shown and for the efforts they have made towards achieving progress in this area. Thanks to their dedicated efforts, events have now taken an encouraging turn. Credit should also go to other international agencies and non-governmental organizations operating in the humanitarian fields and to demining experts and deminers engaged on a daily basis in activities on the ground, often under extremely difficult and even life-threatening conditions.

Despite those efforts, however, uncleared landmines remain in the ground in some 70 countries around the world, and they now total 110 million, according to the estimate of the United Nations. In those countries, they are a serious source of hazard to the lives of innocent children playing on the ground and diligent farmers working in the field. Such mines not only cause death and injury to thousands of innocent civilians every year, they also pose a major obstacle to the efforts for national reconstruction and rehabilitation in the post-conflict period.

What is more threatening is the fact that the number of these uncleared mines has been steadily increasing, owing to the laying of new landmines in numbers far greater than those cleared through the efforts of the United Nations and other organizations. Even if we assume that no new mines were to be laid, merely to remove all the mines already laid could cost anywhere between $50 billion and $100 billion, at the current price. That, in itself, is a staggering figure. In addition, clearing them would alone take many decades at the present pace of clearing 100,000 landmines per year. Those figures vividly illustrate how urgent it is that the international community redouble its efforts in this area and make a gigantic leap forward towards the goal of eventually getting rid of all anti-personnel landmines.

As Japan has repeatedly stressed on previous occasions, we need to pursue parallel approaches if we are serious about attaining our goal. On the one hand, we must tackle the root causes of the problem through the promotion of international efforts toward a global ban on anti-personnel landmines. On the other hand, we must also address the problem of humanitarian assistance relating to landmines through such international efforts as a further promotion of mine-clearance activities and the extension of assistance to landmine victims in a coordinated manner.

On the first of these two fronts of our efforts, considerable headway has been made in recent months. The agreement was reached last May at the Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects. Following that agreement, the Ottawa Conference was held — with considerable success — with a view to promoting international efforts in this direction. The First Committee of the General Assembly this year has adopted a draft resolution urging States to pursue rigorously an effective, legally binding international agreement to ban anti-personnel landmines and to complete the negotiations as soon as possible. For its part, Japan will continue to support such international efforts to realize a global ban, as Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto pledged last June at the G-7 Summit Meeting at Lyon.

On the humanitarian side of the problem, Japan believes that reinforced international efforts should focus in particular on the following three areas: first, cooperation, principally through the United Nations and its affiliated agencies, in landmine clearance; secondly, cooperation in the development of new technology for landmine detection and removal; and, lastly, cooperation for assistance to landmine victims.

As part of its efforts to contribute to international cooperation in these humanitarian activities, Japan intends to organize a Tokyo Conference on Anti-Personnel Landmines in March next year. Compared with the Ottawa Conference, where the focus of attention was on the issue of the proliferation of landmines, the Tokyo

Conference will deal with the humanitarian aspects of the problem, and particularly on the three areas of international cooperation that I have just mentioned. I wish to take this opportunity to offer a brief description of what we in Japan intend to achieve at the Tokyo Conference.

In the area of mine-clearance activities, which is the first area I have mentioned, international support for the work of the United Nations on this score has grown dramatically since the establishment of the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance in November 1994 and the International Meeting on Mine Clearance at Geneva in the summer of 1995. Nevertheless, the number of uncleared landmines around the world, as I mentioned at the outset, has been steadily increasing as a result of new attempts to lay mines, outpacing the efforts to clear existing mines, which now number 110 million. Consequently, there is a pressing need further to reinforce our efforts with regard to mine-clearance activities. While each donor country must continue to increase its financial and other assistance, it is imperative that the countries infested with landmines, in response to such international assistance, make mine-clearance activities an integral part of their national rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes, in particular by developing their own mine-clearance capabilities. Through the concerted efforts of the mine-infested countries and the international community, we should establish a framework of partnership for mine clearance so that international assistance can be utilized in a more effective and coherent way. We hope that the discussions at the Tokyo Conference will lead to the establishment of guidelines for such a partnership.

With regard to the second theme of the Tokyo Conference, namely, the development of new mine-detection and removal technologies, it is clear that in order to cope with the present dire situation, efforts to engender international support are needed on an urgent basis in order to make progress in developing new technologies that will enable us to engage in detection and clearance in an efficient, economical and safe manner. Unless we succeed in developing such innovative technologies, our activities in mine clearance will run the risk of being overwhelmed by the attempts to lay new mines, which will outpace our efforts to clear them.

At the series of meetings held in recent months, including the Copenhagen Conference last June, discussion centred on the technological aspects of this issue. We expect that the discussions at the Tokyo Conference, on the other hand, will deal more with the policy aspects of the issue by focusing mainly on how we in the international community as a whole, while taking stock of the valuable results of the meeting, can promote such research and development efforts and how best we can utilize the results of such technological innovation for our humanitarian activities.

The last — but not the least — important issue that we expect to be discussed at Tokyo is the issue of assistance to landmine victims, or those the Canadian representative has just described as "landmine survivors". This is an issue that has not been squarely dealt with by itself at any of the previous meetings on landmines. In view of the estimated 25,000 mine-related casualties that occur every year, which may often include innocent women and children, the problem of assistance to those victims for medical treatment and rehabilitation is a task of great urgency that the international community must address. It is our hope that the Tokyo Conference will be able to tackle this issue, first, with a view to establishing a new framework of cooperation for international assistance to these landmine victims, and, secondly, with a view to affording an opportunity to draw the attention of the international community with a renewed appeal to respond to the desperate need for such assistance.

It is gratifying to see the issue of landmines attracting much greater international attention today. Together with that new interest, expectations are growing that the ongoing efforts to address the problem will produce tangible results. It is important that we take advantage of this favourable tide in the international environment and act vigorously to address this vitally important problem. The Government of Japan is ready to intensify its efforts to that end, in cooperation with other countries working in this direction. The initiative for the Tokyo Conference is one such modest attempt. It is my sincere hope that with the cooperation of like-minded countries and the United Nations Secretariat, that Conference will produce tangible results, thereby contributing to our common goal of eventually creating a world free from all anti-personnel landmines. Such devices are a scourge from which, in the name of humanity, we must rid ourselves. To this end, we in the international community must renew our commitment, so that the world will be a safer place for our children and our children's children.

Mr. Robinson (United States of America): The United Nations is all too familiar with the numbers associated with the global anti-personnel landmine crisis — an estimated 110 million landmines scattered around the world and 25,000 people, mostly civilians,

killed or maimed each year. Those hidden killers make it impossible for people to advance from wars and internal conflicts towards durable peace and security. Refugees and the internally displaced cannot return home, elections cannot be held in safety, agriculture and economic activity cannot resume and the crises brought on by wars or conflicts continue.

For those reasons, President Clinton, addressing the Assembly last September, called for the swift negotiation of a worldwide ban on anti-personnel landmines.

The United States is committed to bringing this crisis to an end. It has already taken unilateral action, pending conclusion of a global ban. We have stopped the export of anti-personnel landmines and have led an effort to halt all trade in such inhumane instruments. As of today, more than 35 nations have joined us. We have increased research into new technologies for mine detection and clearance and have called upon the international community to support mine-clearance efforts. We have intensified our own mine-clearance programmes.

Earlier this week, at a conference on innovative techniques for landmine neutralization and removal at Washington, D.C., it was said that, at the current rate of mine clearance, it will require decades to remove the mines already planted in the ground. Yet we must not let the magnitude of the problem intimidate us. The United Nations Charter commits us:

> "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war".

Since 1993, the United States Government has worked with non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies and many countries with serious landmine problems. We have invested over $92 million on mine awareness and demining training programmes in 14 countries, establishing indigenous mine-clearance centres to build sustainable programmes and maximize available resources. We have invested an additional $13.5 million in research and development for mine-detection and demining technology. We will invest a further $47 million in humanitarian demining in 1997 alone. Of that figure, $14 million will be spent on research and development.

Let me turn for a moment to our newest demining programme, this one in Bosnia. To support full implementation of the Dayton Peace Accords, we are leading an international effort to begin the clearance of millions of landmines scattered throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. Last June, President Clinton announced a new initiative of up to $15 million to develop an indigenous demining capacity to give the Bosnians the skills and equipment to locate and destroy the mines themselves.

The Mine Action Centre in Bosnia and Herzegovina now operates under a United Nations mandate, coordinating all mine-awareness, data-gathering and mine-clearance activities through three regional offices, one in each ethnic region of the country. It will eventually become an entity of the Bosnian Government. The United States joined the United Nations, the World Bank, the European Union, the Implementation Force of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and other nations to establish this sustainable demining programme.

A United States Special Forces Team recently completed the training of 175 Bosnian deminers representing all three ethnic communities and they, in turn, began demining operations in the field on 7 November. We hope that the international community will build on this first step through further contributions of funds, personnel and equipment so that the United Nations Protection Force Mine Action Centre in Bosnia and Herzegovina can expand its mine-clearance activities throughout the country.

In addition to our country programmes and research efforts, the United States is establishing humanitarian demining centres that will serve as central clearing houses for available demining information and will provide a single-point access to the full spectrum of information, training, research and analysis in support of our global humanitarian demining programme.

For the last three years, the United States has introduced a General Assembly resolution calling for export moratoriums on anti-personnel landmines and their eventual elimination. This year, at the direction of President Clinton's arms control priorities, we introduced the draft resolution on a ban on anti-personnel landmines, calling on States

> "to pursue vigorously an effective, legally-binding international agreement to ban the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines with a view to completing the negotiation as soon as possible". (*A/C.1/51/L.46, para. 1*)

I am pleased to announce that the First Committee recently adopted this draft resolution by an overwhelming vote of 141 in favour, with 10 abstentions and not a single vote against. Clearly, the international community wants action now.

Indeed, there has been continuing international momentum focused on the worldwide landmine crisis, as evidenced in the recent conferences hosted by Denmark and Canada and those planned in Japan and Belgium for 1997.

Standing on this rostrum, President Clinton said that our children deserve to walk the Earth in safety. Mine-awareness training, especially for children, will be needed in many countries for quite some time. In this regard, we noted the recent United Nations announcement that in Kabul, the *Shura* ordered a stop to mine-awareness training for females in Afghanistan. This decision will clearly have major consequences for the security of women and children and should be immediately rescinded.

Focusing on children, let me also take this opportunity to say that we take pride in a joint effort by the United States entertainment industry — Warner Brothers and DC Comics — which joined with the United States Department of Defense and the United Nations to produce a Superman comic book in three languages as a new mine-awareness and education tool for the children of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We are pleased to be an original sponsor of the draft resolution on assistance in mine clearance which is before us today. This draft resolution complements our own initiatives and those of others and demonstrates a growing awareness of the humanitarian consequences of the worldwide landmine scourge. We applaud the United Nations and nations around the world for their work. Let us continue to work together to help restore the health and welfare of war-ravaged communities and countries all over the world and to spare the next generation from this deadly legacy. Let everyone's children and grandchildren walk the Earth in peace and safety.

Mr. Amer (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The importance which the United Nations attaches to the problem of landmines reveals the seriousness of this problem. Landmines threaten human beings' health and very existence and post a grave threat to land and peoples.

It is important to point out that the United Nations has taken steps to eliminate this problem. An international Conference on landmines was held a year ago. In order to focus international efforts along these lines, the Secretary-General established a voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance. The current debate is an important contribution of the United Nations which affirms the interest of the international community in the problem of mines, from which many countries suffer.

In the report contained in document A/51/540, the Secretary-General has given an overall picture of United Nations activities in mine-clearance assistance. My delegation expresses its satisfaction at the efforts being made, including assistance to countries affected by this problem. However, we must point out that the report does not fully satisfy us, despite its broad scope, because it stresses mine-clearance activities in countries with internal conflicts. We have noted this gap in the past.

We feel that the report would be more realistic and more generalized if it drew attention to the situation of countries that have mines that were laid in the past and continue to claim victims. The report could point out honestly and openly this aspect of the problem of anti-personnel landmines, which militate against "An Agenda for Peace".

The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya suffers from old mines. Our suffering began over 50 years ago during the Second World War. Since then, numerous mines have been laid on Libyan territory by belligerents. This has been revealed in numerous studies, which have estimated the presence of millions of mines. A United Nations study, contained in document A/38/383, points out that, in the course of various campaigns in North Africa, the Allied and Axis Powers laid millions of mines on our territory. The number is estimated to be between 5 and 19 million mines.

Regrettably, the Allied forces and the Axis forces departed leaving all these remnants behind without any maps or information showing their location, compounding the serious effect they have had on individuals and the economy. A study, published in document A/49/357/Add.1, states that the number of persons killed by landmines has reached 5,670 and that 4,935 persons have suffered permanent injury. These figures tally with figures contained in another document (A/38/383), which states that, in the three decades following the Second World War, explosive remnants have killed 4,000

Libyans and injured thousands more, and that most of those killed and injured were children.

The grave consequences of landmines have not been limited to human losses. The presence of these mines has impeded efforts to build roads and railways, implement anti-desertification plans and expand land reclamation, as confirmed by field studies. A report issued by the United Nations in 1983 states that approximately 27 per cent of Libya's arable land is covered with mines and that the development of the most important part of the country — the coastal strip — has been impeded by the presence of mines. Moreover, the existence of mines has prevented the exploitation of mineral resources, especially the development of certain deposits of iron and gypsum. Also, oil exploration activities have been affected because of the additional costs of removing war debris from oil fields and the roads leading to them. A study by the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM) said that approximately 27 per cent of agricultural land in Libya, land which is essentially limited, cannot be exploited because of mines.

The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya has tried to address the problems of landmines by drafting several plans, including mine-awareness programmes and mine-clearance training. But the success of these plans has been limited. The conclusion we have drawn from our experience is that it is impossible to eliminate landmines with national resources alone. The mined lands are vast and Libyan technical expertise is limited. Furthermore, there is no information available on the types of mines planted or maps to indicate their location.

In its efforts to solve these problems, my country's delegation welcomes any assistance from the United Nations in the field of mine clearance. However, we would reiterate that any United Nations assistance in this field should not obscure the fact that the countries that have planted mines in the territories of other countries remain primarily responsible for their removal and the payment of compensation for the losses they have caused. This principle has been established in many international and regional forums, including this Assembly, which, in resolution 35/71, called on those States which planted mines to make available to the affected States all information on the areas in which such mines were placed, including maps indicating the position of those areas and information concerning the types of mines, and to assist the affected States in mine clearance.

The General Assembly has also supported the demand by the countries in whose territories the mines were planted that they be compensated by the countries that planted them for the losses they suffered. In resolution 36/188, the General Assembly reiterated its support for the demand of the States affected by the implantation of mines and the presence of other remnants of war on their lands for compensation for the losses incurred from the States responsible for those remnants. In resolutions 37/215, 38/162 and 39/167, the Assembly confirmed that responsibility for the clearance of remnants of war, including landmines, lies with the countries that planted them, and that these countries should provide the information and technical assistance needed to clear mines, and pay compensation for the losses caused by these mines, in addition to the costs of their removal and destruction.

We attach great importance to the implementation of the decisions of the international community on remnants of war. We in Libya do not deny that a number of the countries responsible for the planting of mines in our land have provided us with information. However, this information is insufficient. The landmines on Libyan territory cannot be eliminated with the help of the few maps given to us by the Italian and German Governments. That is why my country would renew its appeal to those two countries, and to others responsible for planting these mines, to indicate to us the types of mines, the length of the minefields and the manner in which the mines were planted, and to provide us with the advanced technology needed to detect and remove these mines. Libya had nothing to do with the circumstances that caused the outbreak of the Second World War and, as such, should not continue to suffer its consequences and tragedies.

The countries that fought that war and transplanted it to our land are responsible for the problems caused for our country for over five decades by these mines. These countries must bear the consequences of their actions. My country welcomes the desire recently expressed by the German Government and the Italian Government to cooperate with us in the detection and removal of mines. We look forward to the practical implementation of the declarations of the two Governments. We hope that their newly expressed attitude will be the beginning of the full implementation of General Assembly resolutions on remnants of war, and lead to assistance in eliminating those remnants and the payment of proper compensation for the losses caused. Any attempt at circumventing this will not exempt these countries from responsibility,

irrespective of the passage of time. They will even have to bear additional responsibilities which will remain valid as long as the "seeds of death" sown by their armies in our land are in place, exploding from time to time, injuring many innocent people among us.

At the start of this statement, we expressed our satisfaction at the efforts of the United Nations in the field of mine clearance. It is a good omen that international cooperation in this field coalesced at the World Conference on Assistance in Mine Clearance and was further strengthened in the International Conference on Mine Clearance Technology held this July. The current discussion falls within this international interest in the crisis. My country's delegation values all these efforts. However, we are concerned at the fact that the international campaign has, so far, focused on dealing with problems resulting from current mines. This is not the right trend. What we need is for these efforts to include old mines, because mines are mines regardless of whether they were planted a long time ago or only recently. All of them jeopardize human life and destroy property. Like recent mines, old mines hamper the expansion of land reclamation and limit economic activity.

On the whole, the presence of mines, both old and new, constitutes a stumbling block for the achievement of development and a source of daily human tragedy and costly material losses. This is a real challenge that needs to be faced very seriously by the international community. Otherwise, the problem of landmines will never disappear and the frightening pictures will continue to haunt our imagination and the imagination of coming generations.

Mr. Gorelik (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): Recently, the international community has paid increasing attention to the range of problems relating to mine clearance that hamper the socio-economic recovery of conflict-affected countries and efforts to address pressing humanitarian problems in this context.

The dismal statistics on landmines are eloquent enough. According to current assessments, there are about 100 million mines planted in over 70 countries of the world. These devices continue to claim the lives of thousands of people — mainly peaceful citizens — even after a conflict has been more or less stabilized. In this regard, the most affected countries are Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia and the former Yugoslavia. Landmines are also widely used in the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia.

For the Russian Federation, the problems posed by the threat and the clearance of mines are painful topics, since Russia is among the most affected States. More than 100,000 explosive devices are detected and destroyed on the territory of Russia every year, while expenses directly associated with such operations amount to more than $25 million a year. Despite the efforts made, thousands of our citizens have fallen victim to the Second World War "mine legacy" in times of peace.

A major task for the United Nations is to broaden its capabilities in overcoming the mine threat in zones of regional conflicts. Mine clearance is becoming an increasingly important and inalienable part of peacekeeping operations. When necessary, it should be, and is, included in the mandates of relevant United Nations missions; alternatively, a mechanism should be devised to ensure the use of the relevant capabilities of regional arrangements and non-governmental organizations in this respect.

Improved coordination between various United Nations agencies in the implementation of mine-clearance programmes, both in the course of United Nations peacekeeping operations and during post-conflict restoration, is becoming increasingly significant. It is in this light that we see close cooperation between the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs as desirable. We would recall that the Security Council, in its presidential statement of 30 August 1996, endorsed better coordination and a clear delineation of responsibilities between the two departments as well as with regard to other agencies of the United Nations system so as to avoid duplication of effort and to guarantee a coherent and integrated approach.

The problem of landmines is especially acute in the context of United Nations peacekeeping operations. United Nations forces are often deployed in areas where there is a persistent and serious mine threat, which challenges the Organization's capacity to carry out its peacekeeping functions effectively. In this connection, we would reaffirm that the main responsibility for landmine clearance in the context of the United Nations peacekeeping operation lies with the parties that have laid the mines.

Similarly, the mine threat will not allow humanitarian missions the necessary scale of operational activities, which is especially painful for such organizations and specialized agencies as the United

Nations Development Programme, the World Food Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund and others.

We hope that the Secretary-General's Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance will be given greater resources and the capacity to play a more active role in the financing of relevant programmes.

In general, all preconditions are already in place for the United Nations to play a leading role in rendering technical assistance and organizing national capacities for landmine clearance. We view this goal through the lens of effective cooperation between the United Nations, regional organizations and interested States.

It is also gratifying to note the United Nations development of standard procedures for mine-clearance operations. We deem it important that the United Nations database on landmines be a further updated and expanded with comprehensive statistical data on all aspects of mine-related problems.

In the Russian Federation, work on a special federal task programme for mine clearance, based on the relevant programmes of distinct regions, has entered its final phase. For us, issues relating to cooperation with the United Nations, the exchange of experience and technical assistance have a tangible, practical significance. It must be added that complex and expensive missions for clearing terrain and installations of mines are performed in the course of peacekeeping operations in the territories of the member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In the area of the Abkhaz conflict alone, CIS peacekeepers have disarmed over 21,000 explosive devices.

The exacerbation of the landmine situation in the Abkhaz conflict zone since early March has affected the safety and security conditions of the local population, refugees and displaced persons, as well as those of CIS peacekeepers and personnel of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia. Our suggestions regarding the problem are currently being discussed with the Secretariat.

Today, there has begun to emerge a legal foundation for international cooperation in mine clearance. An important step in this direction was the consensus adoption by Russia and the other participants in the Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects in Geneva of an amended Protocol II on landmines.

The Russian Federation favours a gradual movement towards the goal of banning the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines. At the basis of the amended Protocol on mines was a carefully developed balance of interests among all participants in the Conference that took into account the existing situation, the real capacities of countries and their security and defence interests.

We are firmly convinced that the main task now is to implement the Protocol, to strengthen its authority and to make it as universal as possible. This would enable us reliably and predictably to progress consistently and to develop step-by-step efforts towards a stricter set of limitations. Any attempt to achieve an explicit ban on mines or to discuss negotiations that have not yet begun only complicates this already complicated matter.

Russia, building on its experience and expertise, is ready to participate in rendering assistance in mine clearance to countries in need of such assistance on a multilateral or bilateral basis. We do so even though Russia itself needs financial support for its own mine-clearance programmes. A solid scientific, technological and industrial capability accumulated in developing detection and mine-clearing equipment allows us to participate in promising international programmes in the field. We are ready to place that capability at the service of international cooperation.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): "Of course, I am very scared, but what can we do? We have to farm to survive", said a Lao mother who was injured in the head by shrapnel from a bomblet.

"Nobody at school told me it could be dangerous", said an adolescent boy, sitting on a metal hospital bed, looking at the wounds to his shoulder and leg, badly burned by a phosphorous bomb.

"There are so many of them, just everywhere. It will be very hard to say one day that Laos is cleared, but we want to reduce the risks", said a United Nations Development Programme adviser in the field.

"We spent three months on a school site which was about one third of a hectare, and where there were 700 unexploded ordnances", said a foreign expert of the Unexploded Ordnance Clearance Programme.

These are the feelings of the people on the ground, at the grass-roots level in Laos, that may perhaps convey an idea of the situation there and how difficult it may be to overcome the problem of unexploded ordnance in our country. We urge the entire world community to give a serious look at the problem and to help us in addressing it in the most efficient way possible.

From 1964 to 1973, during the war, the Lao People's Democratic Republic endured intense ground battles and some of the heaviest aerial bombing in world history. Ground battles left a staggering amount of unexploded ordnance, such as mortar shells, munitions, landmines, and so on. The aerial bombing — 2 million tons for a population of 4.5 million — consisted of anti-personnel cluster bombs that were to explode on or shortly after impact.

Due to the lack of data, the bomblets, or "bombies" as we call them in Laos, can be found everywhere — in the fields, on the hill sides, inside villages, along roads and in the centre of towns. It is estimated that unexploded ordnance contamination still affects up to 50 per cent of Laos's total land mass and 12 out of the 16 provinces — namely, Attopeu, Bolikhamsay, Champassak, Houaphan, Khammouane, Luang Prabang, Oudomsay, Saravane, Savannakhet, Sekong, Vientiane and Xiang Khouang.

Now, more than 20 years since the war ended, we have no systematic national programme of unexploded ordnance clearance or community awareness. Interventions and a number of small projects, however, have been launched in specific localities to deal with the problem.

In 1975, after the war, the former Soviet Union provided us with equipment as well as technical assistance and training to assist in unexploded ordnance clearance. In early 1984, the American Friends Service Committee and the Mennonite Central Committee, two United States non-governmental organizations, provided thousands of shovels to farmers in Xiang Khouang and Houaphan provinces as a safer alternative to the use of traditional hoes for hand-tilling of ordnance-infested areas. Ecoles sans Frontières and World Vision International have produced educational materials about the hazards of unexploded ordnance and have distributed them in areas affected by unexploded ordnance. On a commercial basis, a number of companies have cleared nearly 200 hectares of land in support of irrigation, road and mining projects financed either by aid donors or by private investors.

The United States military has cleared some land of unexploded ordnance to ensure the safety of joint American-Lao teams conducting field investigations regarding American personnel missing in action in Laos. In the framework of an American-sponsored drug control rural development project in Houaphan province, the United States has also undertaken some clearance activities.

From 1994 to early 1996, the Mines Advisory Group, a British non-governmental organization, and the Mennonite Central Committee, a United States non-governmental organization, launched an unexploded ordnance eradication project in Xiang Khouang Province. The project has been able to train 40 Lao clearance technicians and has developed a community awareness component to reduce the number of unexploded ordnance-related accidents in Xiang Khouang.

On 1 August 1995, aware of the tragic aftereffects of war, in particular in the form of landmines and unexploded ordnance, the Lao Government, together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), established a Trust Fund for the clearance of unexploded ordnance. A national programme has been initiated, the objective of which is to reduce the number of civilian casualties and increase the amount of land available for food production and other development activities. Here, our aim is to put in place a long-term, sustainable and nationally directed programme that includes unexploded ordnance clearance, community awareness, surveys and other related activities.

In May 1996, under UNDP auspices, international journalists from Europe, Asia and the United States of America visited Laos to see the problems caused by unexploded ordnance and the strategies of the Government in dealing with them. Last July, following its visit, CNN prepared a half-hour programme that it disseminated throughout the world. For the same purpose of publicizing the work being undertaken, the United Nations Department of Public Information produced a short video. We are grateful to them and thank them all wholeheartedly for helping us in mobilizing the necessary financial resources for the Trust Fund.

While 1996 fund-raising for the first year's programme seems to be quite satisfactory — along with UNDP and UNICEF, Australia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Germany and private donors

have made contributions — efforts are now being focused on securing funds for the medium-term future. It would greatly help the Laos authorities concerned in their efforts to elaborate a long-term sustainable programme if pledges could be made in advance and on a multi-year basis. To this end, UNDP and many friendly countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, Norway, the United States of America and Germany, have already committed funding to future programme activities up to 1998-1999.

Allow me to seize this opportunity, on behalf of the Lao Government and people, to express our sincere thanks to all donor countries and organizations for their important financial contributions to the Trust Fund. It is our hope that other friendly countries will also find it possible to make contributions to the Fund.

Our national programme is ambitious. To implement it is a daunting task. We feel, however, that, with the support and cooperation of the world community, this programme can be put into concrete action.

Mrs. Fritsche (Liechtenstein): The figures put forward to describe the scale and severity of the humanitarian crisis caused by the global proliferation of landmines vary from estimate to estimate. The facts behind the figures, however, remain the same. The social, economic and environmental impact is tremendous. With regard to the humanitarian dimension, one would be inclined to believe that the sheer atrocity of reports about children at play being killed or maimed by "forgotten" anti-personnel landmines should be enough to make everybody understand the urgent need for an immediate ban of these weapons, which indiscriminately bring about death and mutilation. And yet, anti-personnel landmines continue to be produced, exported and used.

At the Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons, held at Geneva in April and May this year, Liechtenstein officially joined those countries that had expressed their support for a global ban on anti-personnel landmines, wishing to help the campaign gather strength and to contribute to creating the political environment necessary for achieving a total ban. Given the human misery caused by landmines every day, the Liechtenstein Government considers it of utmost importance to maintain the momentum for a global ban and to translate it, as soon as possible, into the conclusion of a legally binding international agreement to ban anti-personnel landmines. My delegation therefore wholeheartedly welcomes the results of the Ottawa International Strategy Conference as well as the offer by the Government of Belgium to host a follow-on conference in Brussels in June of next year.

Freeing the world of the scourge of anti-personnel landmines is a manifold endeavour. Even if the continuing emplacement of landmines were stopped immediately — a hypothesis unfortunately still far from reality — the overall number of landmines already scattered around the world makes it clear that international efforts in mine clearance would still have to be increased. The draft resolution before us today constitutes an important means of coordinating and concerting the activities of the international community in this respect. For this reason, Liechtenstein has decided to co-sponsor this draft resolution, as it has done in the past, and we hope that the text will be adopted by consensus.

The task of demining mine-infested countries is still monumental and the responsibility for mine clearance lies first and foremost with the parties responsible for laying them. The development of national and local mine-clearance capacities plays an important role in tackling the striking imbalance between the number of mines already cleared and those still threatening the lives of civilians in those countries. At the same time, the promotion of technical improvements to maximize the effectiveness of mine detection and humanitarian mine-clearance operations is urgently needed. While commending the initiatives already taken by some countries to promote research and development of new mine-clearance technologies, we wish to stress the importance of effective coordination of all activities related to mine clearance by the United Nations through its focal point, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. The Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance was established in order to strengthen this coordination role of the United Nations. Liechtenstein has contributed to this Fund.

As long as millions of landmines keep threatening the lives and living conditions of civilians in many countries, promoting awareness, *inter alia*, through educational measures, of the dangers posed by landmines, especially among children, is crucial to preventing these vicious weapons from taking a much heavier toll. However, where all efforts of the international community have failed and a mine has fulfilled its devastating task, mine victims must be an essential part of the international community's integrated approach to the landmine crisis. In this connection, we wish to

commend the untiring efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross and of non-governmental organizations in providing medical care and psychological support to the victims of landmines in order to facilitate their full reintegration and participation in society.

All available figures on the extent and complexity of the landmine crisis make clear that the commitment of the international community to overcoming the crisis must be firm and lasting. We strongly hope that the adoption of the draft resolution before us by the General Assembly will contribute to a further significant strengthening of political will and collective energies to enhance the efforts to free the world of this scourge.

Mr. Martini Herrera (Guatemala) (*interpretation from Spanish*): It is very encouraging that so many Governments and international organizations are becoming fully aware of the suffering and tragedy caused by the use of anti-personnel landmines. Guatemala has strongly condemned the production, manufacture, stockpiling, sale and planting of mines. My country has had tragic and painful experience of the physical and psychological effects of landmines.

In this extremely crucial moment in Central American history — as we move towards reconstruction, rehabilitation and the search for a firm and lasting peace after lengthy years of conflict, with their serious social repercussions, countless dead and missing, economic marginalization and hundreds of thousands of injured and handicapped — this is a matter of great urgency.

The social repercussions of planting anti-personnel landmines complicate and hinder the return of refugees and displaced persons, who are vital to consolidating peace processes; affect economic productivity, since agricultural lands that were mined during conflicts cannot be used even long after the conflicts have ended; and delay the provision of essential social services, such as medical care, that had already been weakened by prolonged years of strife.

My country shares the pain and suffering of those who, in so many countries, have fallen victim to landmines. Guatemala has made great efforts, with international assistance, to carry out mine clearance despite financial restrictions and the scope and variety of the responsibilities borne by various sectors. Nonetheless, much remains to be done. We urge the international community to eliminate bellicose language and anti-personnel landmines and we wholeheartedly support all actions leading to their prohibition, as reflected in our support for the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects, as well as its three Protocols. Similarly, we welcome the recent ratifications of and accessions to that Convention.

We note with satisfaction the holding of international conferences on this item: the Pledging Conference on mine clearance, held in Geneva in July 1995, as well as the International Conference on Mine Clearance Technology, held in Denmark in 1996. We also support the statements made on the matter at meetings such as the Lyon and Cartagena summits and the International Strategy Conference held at Ottawa in October this year.

Similarly, we welcome the offer of the Government of Belgium to hold the follow-on conference to the Ottawa Conference at Brussels in 1997, and the conference on anti-personnel landmines to take place at Tokyo in March 1997.

The delegation of Guatemala thanks the Secretary-General for his report, contained in document A/51/540, on United Nations assistance in mine clearance, and other noteworthy documents. It also thanks the Member States, international organizations and foundations that have made contributions to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance.

My country's delegation welcomes the overwhelming adoption on 13 November 1996 of draft resolution A/C.1/51/L.46, entitled "An international agreement to ban anti-personnel landmines". The draft resolution, which was sponsored by 85 countries, including Guatemala, received 141 votes in favour, none against and just 10 abstentions in the First Committee at the fifty-first session of the General Assembly. We believe that the draft resolution on assistance in mine clearance just introduced by the representative of Ireland, in its capacity as current holder of the Presidency on behalf of the European Union, merits adoption by consensus.

These resolutions on landmines have both humanitarian and political components that address assistance to victims. But we also expect firm support for countries that suffer from that scourge, whose economies are based on agriculture, and where the recovery of agricultural land takes 20 or 30 years and even longer, meaning under-development, economic backwardness and

lack of productivity. In the future, measures must be drastic and ongoing.

My delegation welcomes the decision of several countries to declare temporary or permanent moratoriums covering some aspects of anti-personnel mines, such as the production, sale, stockpiling or total prohibition of mines, and awaits even more meaningful action.

The fundamental issue is and will continue to be the total ban on anti-personnel landmines in all their aspects. The objective is not to exchange existing mines for more modern or sophisticated ones. The objective is to eliminate them entirely from the arsenal, the market, and the language of war in general. We believe that each demining operation must be treated as a separate case, based on the geographical situation of the victim country, the origins of the conflict and the customs and traditions of the population that apply to it.

Guatemala supports the strengthening of the Mine Clearance and Policy Unit within the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat, as well as the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance, established at the Geneva Conference.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that my Government will support all those efforts aimed at resolving landmine problems, and particularly the conclusion of an international agreement banning anti-personnel landmines.

Mr. Osman (Afghanistan): The relevant authorities of the Islamic State of Afghanistan, pursuant to the resolution entitled "Assistance in mine clearance", will address the problem of landmines from two aspects: first, the problems caused by the increasing presence of mines and other unexploded devices resulting from armed conflicts; and second, the manner in which the United Nations contribution to resolving the problems related to mine clearance could be strengthened.

Afghanistan thanks the Secretary-General for his report on assistance in mine clearance and draws the attention of the United Nations to the country's particular problem: the presence of 10 million landmines planted in Afghan soil during the 14 years of armed aggression in the 1980s and by forces aided from the outside in the later conflict in Afghanistan. In his report on the work of the Organization in previous years, the Secretary-General has said that of all the tasks involved in setting a nation on a new road to peace and prosperity, perhaps none has the immediate urgency of mine clearance. No attempt to restore a sense of community and security can succeed without effective landmine clearance.

According to the United Nations, of the 10 war-stricken countries and territories, Afghanistan is the most seriously affected country in the world as far as landmines are concerned. Surely, the gravity and cruelty of the threat to Afghan lives as a result of the existence of millions of landmines and other unexploded ordnance on Afghan soil cannot be overemphasized. The problem has seriously jeopardized all efforts geared not only to reconstruction and the rehabilitation and repatriation of refugees, but above all to the restoration of peace and normalcy and the basic human services.

The landmine is also known as a weapon of mass destruction in slow motion, as mentioned in the Secretary-General's report, contained in document A/50/701 of 3 November 1995. Mines are used indiscriminately and as a result about 100,000 innocent civilians have been maimed or lost their lives, as reported by the International Committee of the Red Cross. Landmines have disrupted daily life in Afghanistan and their impact on agriculture, livestock and transportation has been immense. Afghanistan's roads have been devastated because of landmines. Afghanistan, as a landlocked country, depends heavily on its transit routes. But we recognize and appreciate the efforts of the United Nations agencies, such as the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA), and other States for their assistance in demining.

Nevertheless, there is more to be done, especially in the field of the rehabilitation of victims, anti-personnel landmine clearance and the development of the better techniques needed to clear the 10 million landmines already deployed in Afghanistan.

We also recognize the active participation of the countries of the European Union and Canada and United States assistance efforts in landmine clearance and its concern over the ending of landmine awareness and clearance training for women and children. We also express gratitude to Japan, Germany and Belgium, which offered to host conferences on anti-personnel landmines next year.

It is worth mentioning that our nation, like many least developed and small countries, may not be able to contribute financially, but it is prepared to provide all

kinds of facilities for the work of technical experts in mine clearance. Afghanistan strongly supports and is a sponsor of the draft resolution on assistance in landmine clearance.

Ms. Ramírez (Argentina) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Once again the humanitarian crisis caused by the laying of anti-personnel landmines has led the General Assembly to speak out, with a view to finding agreed ways and means to resolve the social and economic consequences of this scourge.

We note with satisfaction that this year important progress has been made multilaterally, including the holding at Ottawa on 5 October of an international conference to establish a global ban on anti-personnel mines; the International Conference on Mine-Clearance Technology, held at Elsinore, Denmark, from 2 to 4 July; the sponsorship of more than 120 States of the draft resolution to be introduced by the United States on an international agreement to ban anti-personnel landmines; and the upcoming international conferences on the matter to be held at Tokyo, Japan, in March 1997 and in Belgium in June 1997.

These new undertakings are clear and firm signals from the international community on the need to resolve the deadly catastrophe caused by the proliferation and use of anti-personnel mines. In this context, we thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, for the activities of the Organization, which are aptly reflected in the report recently submitted to the General Assembly.

We believe that that report is very clear on the work carried out by each of the departments and agencies of the United Nations system. We consider that the objective of the various mine-clearance programmes should be the establishment of a sustainable national mechanism for mine clearance.

We believe that the work of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in promoting security procedures for mine clearance and the search for new and improved technologies is very important. We value that Department's work in updating and expanding the United Nations database on landmines, which is the world's largest source of landmine information.

Argentina clearly and firmly holds that the proliferation and indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines are important problems that call for priority consideration. In that context, my country firmly believes that there is an immediate need to solve the humanitarian problems resulting from the planting of anti-personnel landmines. We believe that the first step in that direction should the adoption of an international treaty banning landmines, including their production, transfer and stockpiling. Those prohibitions would make it possible to put an end to the continuing escalation in the number of mines and their devastating humanitarian consequences.

We believe that the future treaty should be the result of intensive negotiations among all States; by this we mean those States affected by the indiscriminate laying of mines and those States producing them. To consider a treaty that does not have the support of those States would be to create an instrument that would be sterile in terms of its future legal effects.

We hope that the next time we meet here on this item we will have a treaty that will help do away with what the Secretary-General calls "an intolerable blemish on civilization". (*A/51/540, para. 112*)

Mr. McCook (Jamaica): In welcoming the report of the Secretary-General on agenda item 34, "Assistance in mine clearance", we must state that we are deeply troubled by the suffering caused by the effects of landmines in conflict and post-conflict situations around the globe.

The report provides chilling statistics that demonstrate the magnitude of the problem posed by landmines. It estimates that over 110 million landmines are buried in some 70 countries, that over 25,000 mine-related casualties occur each year, with most of the victims being civilians, many of them children. It concludes that in excess of $50 billion will be needed to clear landmines now laid.

Throughout the regions affected by landmines, life remains perilous. Children play at the risk of their lives, and adults undertake their tasks in a precarious gamble with death and dismemberment.

The facts presented in the report underscore the importance of this mission of mine clearance for the United Nations system and supportive national and international bodies. Indeed, they demonstrate dramatically the need for further concerted action by the international community to deal with the problems posed by landmines around the globe.

We support the efforts to train more and more persons in the techniques of demining and to develop new

and improved technologies for mine clearance. We commend the Government of Denmark for its initiative in convening the International Conference on Mine-Clearance Technology, held in July of this year with the support of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.

It is a sad fact that many nations beleaguered by conflicts and their aftermath have to contend with the tremendous costs of caring for victims of landmine explosions. The plight of these societies already severely traumatized by conflict is made worse by the health care crisis that results from the need to commit scarce facilities and human and financial resources to the care of landmine victims.

Their condition is made worse by the fact that landmines pose severe impediments to economic growth; they render agricultural areas useless, restrict commercial movement and generally have a destabilizing effect on the economic sector. These combined concerns reinforce the need for all members of the international community to be committed to the task of dealing with the effects of landmines.

In this connection, it is pleasing to note that the Voluntary Trust Fund for demining support has been able to make an impact on the programmes of mine clearance undertaken with United Nations support. We expect the Fund to provide continued support for this important activity, and we commend the donors that have contributed to its growth.

We commend the Department of Humanitarian Affairs for its far-reaching efforts in the field of mine clearance. We also commend the Department of Peacekeeping Operations for the demining activities undertaken in the context of peacekeeping operations. We are particularly pleased that there is close coordination between the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and other relevant agencies in these endeavours.

My delegation supports the initiatives to develop programmes that include national involvement, in terms of both the training of local demining personnel and the development of national bodies for the coordination of demining efforts. These initiatives, coupled with public information and public education activities designed to alert communities to the dangers posed by landmines, are all vitally important. We commend the Department of Public Information and media organizations that have lent support to these programmes.

Finally, we wish to address two critical areas of action on which the international community must focus if it is effectively to address this problem for the medium and long term. The first is concerted research and development in the area of demining technology, and the other is a commitment to stop the use of anti-personnel landmines. We must retreat from the development and use of these weapons, whose indiscriminate and inhumane effects outweigh any strategic value ascribed to them. Let us consider above all the tragic toll that landmines have taken and will continue to take on innocent civilians, including children, and act boldly to bring to an end the use of these devices.

Mr. Benítez Sáenz (Uruguay) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Uruguay is pleased that the General Assembly is once again considering the item on assistance in mine clearance and will consider a draft resolution on assistance in dealing with the tremendous humanitarian problem caused by the presence of these lethal devices. We believe that that initiative will be adopted by consensus, as has been the case in previous years.

My country will once again be a sponsor of the draft resolution on assistance in mine clearance in the conviction that the international community must take urgent steps to deal with and begin to resolve the material and economic consequences of these weapons. Uruguayan contingents in Angola, Mozambique and Western Sahara have had to face the risks associated with mine-clearance activities, and have suffered casualties as a result. We are very much aware of the tragic consequences of these weapons that have been accurately described as weapons of mass destruction, especially for the civilian population, and most particularly for children. That is why we have spoken out repeatedly against the transfer, stockpiling and production of anti-personnel landmines.

Uruguay has a decidedly humanitarian approach to the problem and supports the views expressed by the Secretary-General in focusing on the impact of armed conflict on children. In this respect, we should like to reiterate our belief that children must not continue to be exposed to the death and mutilation caused by anti-personnel landmines. We understand that we are faced with a serious threat and believe that the international community must be active in mine clearance. We pledge to do our utmost to achieve an international agreement prohibiting the use of anti-personnel landmines.

My country spoke out clearly at the Security Council meeting on 15 August 1996, when the Council

considered demining within the context of peacekeeping operations, and firmly believes in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations programmes on the security, health and right to life of the personnel who selflessly participate in humanitarian, peacekeeping and rehabilitation operations. We know that the cost of mine clearance is very high, and technological progress to improve detection instruments requires international cooperation. However, what is even more important is that we do not continue to lose lives. The figures of human lives lost have already reached a level that is more than alarming. It is up to all of us to prevent more deaths.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.